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ISRAEL'S PLACE IN UNIVERSAL HISTORY.

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IN THE average work on general history there is assigned to Israel anything but a position of prominence. The tendency has been rather to exclude this people from the leading history-making nations of the earth and to confine its mission in the ups and downs of the human race to the sphere of "sacred" history. This has been done largely under the influence of the older canons of historiography, according to which political and military upheavals in the records of nations were regarded as the chief factors and forces in their development, and accordingly legitimately also the prime data with which history was called upon to deal. The fact that data of this kind, and not the material necessary for the construction of a philosophic scheme of history, formed almost entirely the contents of the oldest sources in this department of research made such a procedure the most natural thing in the world. Only in the more thorough universal histories of recent decades, such as Ranke's, has Israel received anything like the consideration it deserves in the general development of the past.

A nation is historic to just that degree and extent to which it supplies permanent factors and agencies in the unfolding of human activity and thought in later ages. Judged by this canon Israel is entitled to a leading position among the nations of antiquity, probably the most prominent. There have been many powerful nations of the past, exceeding in military strength and political power a thousandfold the people of Israel; yet in the composite of ideas and ideals that make up modern life no elements can be traced back to these, and accordingly no concern above that of natural interest and curiosity is attached to their fate. Not a few powerful nations of antiquity, of whose thought

and life we are reasonably well informed, have practically contributed little or nothing to the forces that make up modern civilization. The records of the Egyptians are exceedingly interesting, and in many respects the inscriptions, papyrus finds, etc., that the land of the Pharaohs has in recent decades been so liberally showering upon the savant and the student are very instructive; yet the literature, the theology and religion, the type of civilization, the peculiar arts and sciences of the Egyptians have left no impress whatever on modern thought and life; and in this, the highest, sense of what constitutes a historic people the Egyptian race is decidedly inferior to that people whom at one time their rulers so sorely oppressed. Virtually the same is true of the powerful nations of the Euphrates valley, whose cuneiform literature now already exceeds in extent and in variety that of the Old Testament itself, and who, together with the Egyptians, for centuries made the land of Palestine their tramping ground in their terrible struggles to attain the highest ideal of ancient statescraft—namely, the establishment of a world's empire; yet the pigmy kingdom which they mention only incidentally in their boastful records of conquests has affected the fate of peoples and nations a thousand times more than their victories. Even should it turn out to be the case, what is repeatedly claimed—namely, that not a few of the fundamental ideas in Israel's religious system were derived from the Babylonians—it would nevertheless remain to the credit of Israel to have made these ideas the potent agencies in history that they have been and still are. Even should the lost records of other powerful peoples, such as the Hittites, still be unearthed and deciphered, there can be no reason to believe that any of the leading and permanent elements in history could be traced to these sources. As far as such elements are concerned, some of the greatest nations of the earth and the representatives of the oldest types of civilization might almost as well not have existed. The civilization of China, with its boasted antiquity, has been practically a *nil* in the development of history, and is even yet.

The prominence of Israel and its position in universal history are determined by the fact that this people, in the shape and

form that its religious ideals were developed by Christianity, has contributed that factor which in the history of the individual and of nations is the most powerful—namely, the religious. It must distinctly be remembered that it is not Israel as such, but Israel as legitimately represented in Christianity, that has proved to be such an agency in the past and present. Israel as such was never a missionizing religion or people, notwithstanding the well-known proselyting endeavors of the Pharisees of the New Testament period. In its Old Testament phase of development Israel never could nor would have proved to be a powerful agent in human history. Of this fact the records of the past as well as the Israel of today are ample witnesses. Israel today makes no converts and virtually tries to make none. Its world-wide mission could be and was recognized only then when its principles and religious teachings and tenets attained their highest and divinely intended development in Christianity. Not in literature, not in religious thought, not in any of the leading departments of human activity and thought, except the material and the financial, is the influence of Israel in any of its unique phases and peculiarities felt, and even here it is an open question whether it is for good or for harm. On the other hand, the great ideas that constitute the life of Christianity and have made it the prime agency in the world's development have their historic source in Jewish soil, and are the legitimate outcome of what Israel's prophets and seers taught and proclaimed.

In supplying this element to the composite of modern life, Israel, through Christianity, has furnished the prime agency in this life. Virtually there are but three nations of antiquity upon the shoulders of which modern society and civilization stand, namely, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Jewish. The Greeks supplied the forms of thought, the type and the method of logical and philosophical systems, the ideals of the beautiful, and, in general, the basis for learned and scientific research; the Romans have, by their models and teachings, furnished the basis of modern social and political organizations for the state and government, and the general construction of law and society. But the Jews have indirectly, through Christianity, supplied the

ideals that control the highest spiritual and religious life. The Romans and the Greeks have satisfied the needs of the head, but the chosen people those of the heart. It is a fact not to be denied that the religious has always been, and in the nature of the case always will be, the most potent factor and force in the makeup of peoples and of individuals. Not language, not kinship, not the ties of flesh and blood, move the hearts of men as do their religious convictions, hopes, and feelings. This principle, recognized repeatedly by Christ in his teachings, is one of the chief teachings of the philosophy of history. And it is a fact not to be denied that even in circles that do not professedly recognize Christianity and its claims, and in fact in the modern social order in general, the accepted canons of what is good or bad, of what is lawful or what is unlawful, the undercurrent that rules and reigns supreme in modern thought and life, are substantially the expression, although often unconsciously so, of what a Moses, or an Isaiah, or a David, taught and commended. The Jewish religion, as it appears in perfect form in Christianity, is now and has been not only the most powerful recognized, but also the most powerful latent force in the historical development of the peoples of our times, in their political ups and downs, in their literature, in their social and economic life, in their hopes and aspirations. The whole intellectual and spiritual atmosphere which modern peoples breathe, and in which they move and have their being, is saturated with ideas and thoughts that first found their expression in the historic precincts of the chosen people. As Ewald says, in his *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, the history of Israel "is at bottom the history of the gradual unfolding, through all the stages of development, up to the stage of complete victory, of the true religion, which was unfolded and spread to become the blessing and possession of all nations."

The highest agency in history are *ideas*, and the highest ideas in the records of the human race have been supplied by Israel. It is another question whether the possession of this agency by Israel is a natural development of a people endowed and gifted above all others for the unfolding of religious thought, or if it was a product of special providential revelation. For the

point at issue the source of this power is a matter of indifference ; its possession and employment as a factor in history assigns to Israel its position among the nations of the past. That, however, it was not a natural talent, but a special gift, would appear among other things from the fact that the other Semitic peoples in no way seemed to share in this endowment. Whatever religious importance Mohammedanism has derived from Judaism and Christianity, the religion of the Arabs before the Mohammedan period is very crude and elementary ; at any rate, does not show anything like such a high stage of development as that which characterizes Israel's religion. It is true that Israel has done little in other respects, such as literature, the arts, the sciences, etc., but, while failing to furnish leading contributions to later civilization in this regard, it has furnished those that are higher and more important. Stade, in his *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, Einleitung, p. 4, says : " Israel's significance in the history of the human race consists in this, that this people was the leader in the sphere of religion, just as the Greeks were in the domain of philosophy, and the Romans in the domain of politics and statesmanship. In fact, only in Israel religion as such really becomes a fact."